

FORM B – BUILDING

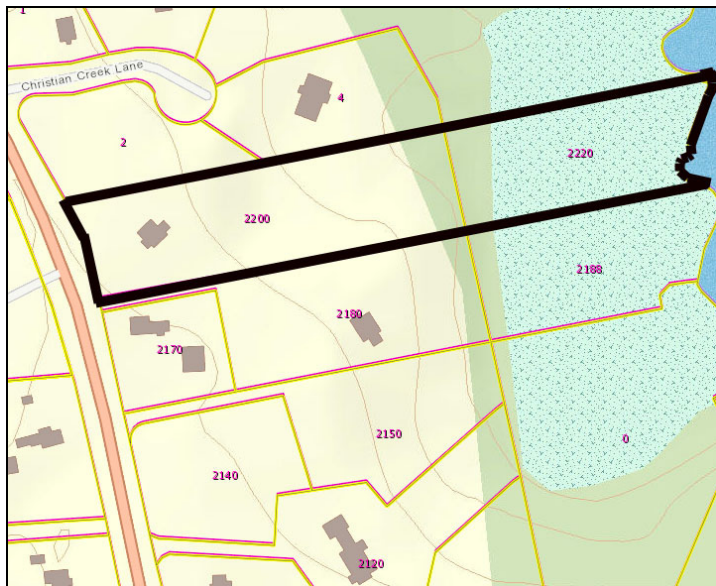
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



View from

Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Larson Fisher Associates, Inc. with Kathryn Grover

Organization: Eastham Historical Commission

Date: June 2013

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

15-98A

ORLEANS

EAS.689

Town/City: Town of Eastham

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Eastham Center

Address: 2200 State Highway

Historic Name: Margaret DeSilver House

Uses: Present: single-family residence

Original: single-family residence

Date of Construction: c. 1947

Source: tax records, deeds

Style/Form: undetermined/Saltbox

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete block

Wall/Trim: wood shingles

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: none

Major Alterations (*with dates*): wood balcony/deck (2008)

Condition: good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 1.90 acres

Setting: The subject property is located on the east side of State Highway/Rt. 6 and has frontage on Christian Creek, a tributary of Salt Pond Bay. The Cape Cod Seashore National Park along that waterfront overlays the eastern portion of this property. Single family residential properties on the Rabbit Run cul-de-sac lie to the north; a large cabin colony (formerly Whispering Pines and now a condominium complex) is across the highway to the west and a multi-house, as well as a single family lot about the property on the south.

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☐ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The terrain of the subject property slopes down from west to east—from the grade of State Highway to the bank of the Christian Creek. The house on the subject property is a simple two-story wood frame building with a saltbox form having a gable roof and a brick center chimney and is oriented with its front facing south. The first floor of the front facade is asymmetrically organized with four bays. A kitchen window on this facade has been altered (an awning was installed in 2008), but virtually all of its original six-over-six windows have been retained.¹ The second floor of the front has three bays where windows are evenly spaced. A one-story ell left side ell, also with a gable roof, appears to be original (see footprint on 1950 plan, below). The house is clad with wood shingles and has wood corner boards and trim. Off the right (east) side is a large wood balcony/deck, rebuilt in 2008, supported by wood posts; the sloping lot provides for an exposed foundation and walkout basement on this side.² A retaining wall extends several feet south from the right front (southeast) corner of the house and a flagstone walkway leads down the slope from an unimproved driveway to a flagstone patio in front of the house. The property is heavily vegetated and has a row of cedar trees running along the west side of the house to screen it from the highway.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Town Assessors' records state that the house at 2200 State Highway was built in 1936, but deeds and tax commitment records do not support that date. The house occupies land that had belonged to the family of Joshua Cole since the late 1850s. In the first two decades of the 1900s the property belonged to Austin E. and Harriet M. Nickerson Cole. Austin Everett Cole was born in Eastham in 1859, the son of Joshua and Sophia Cole, Jr. Austin Cole's first wife, Eulalia Savage Cole, died in 1902, and in 1908 he married Harriet Mudge Nickerson, a Harwich native then living in Eastham and working as a housekeeper. In 1910 Austin Cole was working as a farmer in Eastham; his household included his wife Harriet and his son from his first marriage, Roger Delwin Cole (b. in 1897). Austin Cole was a truck farmer in 1920, and his son Roger, then twenty-two, worked for him.

Austin Cole died between 1920 and 1929. In October of 1929 Roger Cole and his sister Minnie, who lived in Norwood and has a summer home on Locust Road, deeded their interest in their late father's real property in Eastham to Harriet M. Cole. The 1930 census lists her as a widow living on State Highway with \$3000 in real property and the income of one boarder. She died by November 1934, and her heirs sold two parcels, one of them being the subject property, to Leslie Emerson Chase of Eastham.³ Chase ran an asparagus farm on Salt Pond Road and was the town clerk, treasurer, and tax collector.⁴ His family home was in North Eastham; thus it appears that he acquired the property for potential income. Tax records for 1937 show Chase as owning no buildings except a "tool house" (as had the 1931 tax records) and 3.6 acres of "homestead land AEC," no doubt signifying Austin E. Chase as well as 35 acres elsewhere in town.

In May 1946 Leslie Chase sold a nine-acre tract including the subject property to Bay Side Real Estate Trust. The deed does not mention the presence of buildings. In February 1947 the trust sold a parcel of 150 square feet with no mention of building to Truesdell Fife, Jr., who in October 1950 sold it, with a building, to Margaret DeSilver of New York City. In November, 1951, the trust sold another three acres of the tract to DeSilver. The second parcel abutted the first on the west and extended to Christian Creek. No deeds for property sales to Margaret DeSilver are recorded before 1950, yet tax records for 1947 show her with a house valued at \$2800 and two contiguous parcels totaling 2.02 acres. The house must be that at 2200 State Highway, built by Fife prior to conveying it to DeSilver. A Barnstable County Land Court Plan of October 1950 (see below) depicts the house on the parcel bordering the east side of State Highway.⁵

Born in Reading in 1911, Truesdell Charles Fife, Jr. was the son of Truesdell Charles Fife of Clinton, Iowa, and Eastham native Cynthia Alice Horton, daughter of Reuben H. and Cynthia Clark Horton. Fife Sr. was a plumber with a firm in Wakefield and several patents for water heaters. The 1938 Wakefield directory lists Truesdell Fife, Jr. as a "dramatic director," but little else is known about him. By contrast, a fair amount is known about Margaret DeSilver and her family. She was born Margaret Burnham in 1890 in Philadelphia; her grandson later described her as "an heiress, friend, and patron to artists, and to writers such as John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Dawn Powell, and Dorothy Parker among others." She married Albert DeSilver in 1913, just after he graduated from Columbia Law School. Born in Brooklyn in 1886, DeSilver was an attorney in New York City and in 1918 resigned from his firm to help found the National Civil Liberties Bureau, later known as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). DeSilver, according to one account, was committed to the defense of immigrants, Communists and others who

¹ Town of Eastham records, building permit dated Sept. 30, 2008.

² Ibid. The house was reroofed at this time too under the same permit.

³ Roger D. and Minnie C. Cole to Harriet M. Cole, 31 October 1929, Barnstable County Registry of Deeds (hereafter cited as BCD) 504:4; Alabama F. Weekes, Clarissa D. Walker, Mary Josephine Nickerson, all of Harwich; Lawrence F. Nickerson, Harwich; Albert M. Nickerson, Dennis, to Leslie E. Chase, 2 November 1934, BCD 507:84.

⁴ For biographical background on Chase, see Elroy S. Thompson, *History of Plymouth, Norfolk and Barnstable Counties* (New York: Worcester Publishing Co., 1928), 3:367, and J. Russell Chase, interviews with Vivian Andrist, 29 January 1986 and 7 May 1987, Eastham Historical Commission and Eastham Public Library.

⁵ Leslie E. Chase to Ralph W. Guida and Harold I. Swift, trustees Bay Side Real Estate Trust, 24 May 1946, BCD 648:223; Guida and Swift, trustees, to Truesdell Fife, Jr., 12 February 1947, BCD 665:398; Fife to Margaret DeSilver, 10 October 1950, BCD 765:593; Harold I. Swift to DeSilver, 2 November 1951, BCD 797:545. See also "Plan of Land in Eastham," October 1950, Barnstable County Registry of Deeds Land Court Plan 22697A.

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were being apprehended under the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918. When the ACLU was created in 1920, he became its associate director and he supplied more than half of the organization's operating budget from his own funds until he was killed by an express commuter train in 1924. After her husband's death Margaret DeSilver sent the couple's three children to live with relatives in Upstate New York. Margaret DeSilver remained on the board of the ACLU until the 1940s, when suspected Communist influence on the board triggered her resignation.⁶

In 1951 Margaret DeSilver petitioned the Massachusetts Land Court to clarify the boundaries of the parcels she had acquired, and the court certified her as the owner of the parcel with the boundaries shown on a November 1951 plan. Roughly three years after DeSilver's death in June 1962, the court certified her son George Burnham DeSilver and his wife Claire, then living in the District of Columbia, as the owners of the parcel. In 1967 George DeSilver sold the property to a realty company, who sold it a month later to William E. and Anne D. Sheldon Swift of New Haven, Connecticut. William Everett Swift was born in Scarsdale, New York, in 1914 and was a physician. Anne Sheldon Swift died in January 2003, and William C. Swift died in July 2007. Their death certificates list 2200 State Highway as their last residence before they moved to EPOCH Senior Health Care in Brewster. In 2009 William Harrison Swift, probably their son, the subject property to 2200 Route 6 LLC in 2009.⁷

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MAPS

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SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES

⁶ See Claire DeSilver, "The Angel in the Story," reply to Gore Vidal review of *The Diaries of Dawn Powell*, New York Review of Books, 28 March 1996; Roderick T. Beaman, "The American Civil Liberties Union: Uncomfortable Truths about the Origins," 16 September 2004, Alex Jones' PrisonPlanet.com, and "The DeSilver Legacy Society," ACLU website, www.aclu.planyourlegacy.org/society.php; Albert Flynn DeSilver, *Beamish Boy: A Memoir* (Smashwords Edition, 2012-13). In the late 1920s DeSilver became involved with leftist labor leader Carlo Tresca, who was murdered in 1943; historians suggest that members of either the Mafia or the Communist Party, both of which Tresca had openly criticized, assassinated him.

⁷ Massachusetts Land Court in petition of Margaret DeSilver (#22697), 11 April 1951, Barnstable County Land Court (hereafter cited as BCLC) Document #29992-1, Certificate of Title 12645; Massachusetts Land Court, in petition of Margaret DeSilver (#23313), 17 July 1952, BCLC Document #33752-1; Order for New Certificate after Death of Registered Owner, 15 February 1965, BCLC Document #94477-1 (Certificate 34570); George Burnham DeSilver to Enterprise of Orleans Inc., 22 June 1967, BCLC Certificate 40322; Enterprise of Orleans Inc. to William E. and Anne D. S. Swift, New Haven CT, 27 July 1967, BCLC Certificate 40611; William H. Swift (aka William Harrison Swift), trustee William E. Swift Revocable Living Trust, 2200 State Highway, to 2200 Route 6 LLC, 18 June 2009, BCLC Certificate 188922. See also Death Certificates for Anne D. Swift (BCD 909522:1) and William Everett Swift (BCLC Document 1117757-1) and "Plan of Land in Eastham, Mass. to be filed in the Land Court by Margaret DeSilver," November 1951, BCLC Plan 23313A, and "Plan of Land in Eastham," October 1950, BCLC Plan 22697A.

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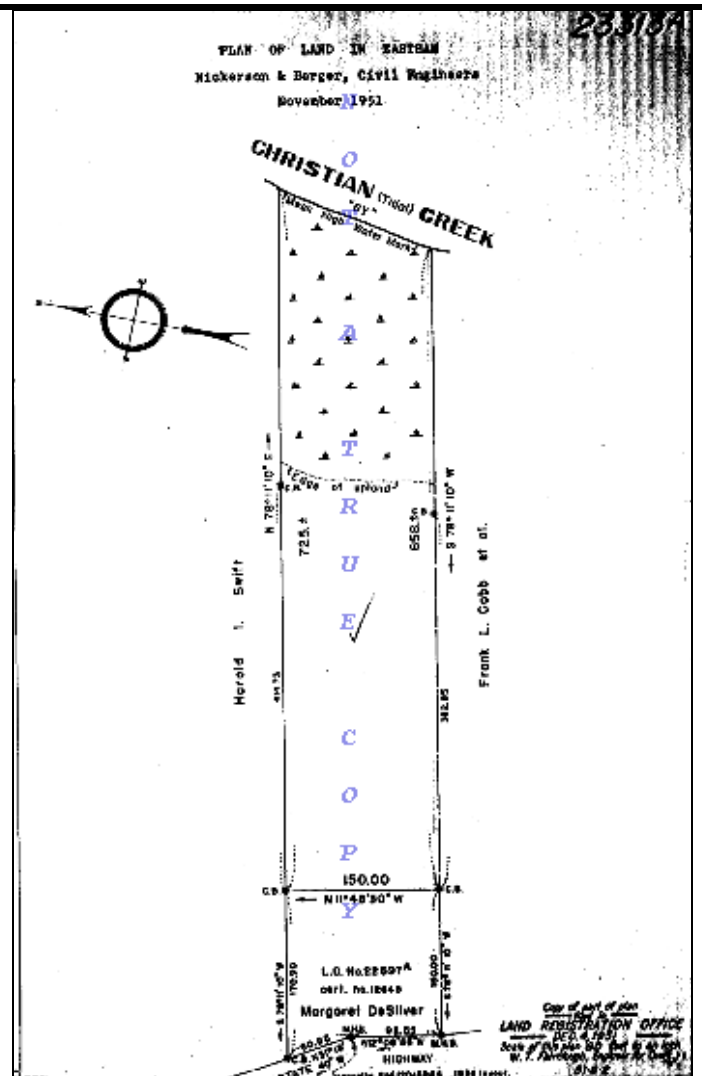
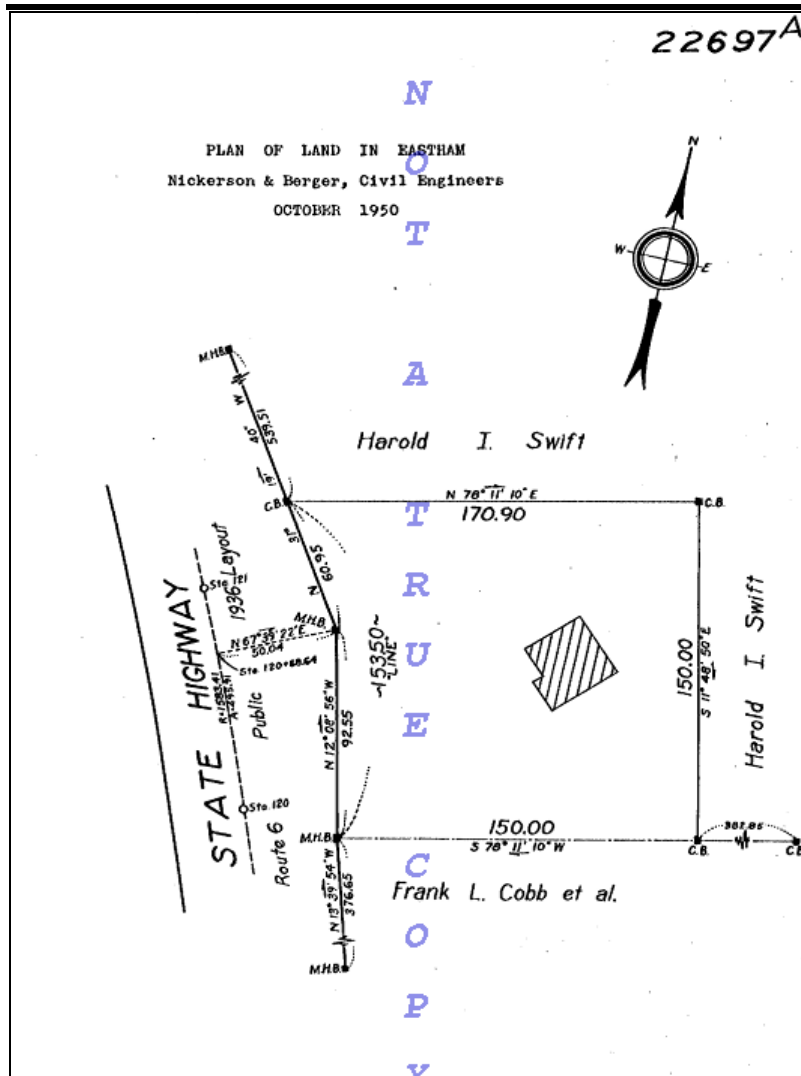
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LEFT: Land Court Plan 22697A, 1950: depicting 2200 State Highway with dwelling. RIGHT: Land Court Plan 23313A (1951) labels Margaret DeSilver as owner of the parcel extending from State Highway to Christian Creek.

PHOTOGRAPHS

(credit Larson Fisher Associates, 2012-2013 unless otherwise noted)

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View from northwest.



View from southwest.